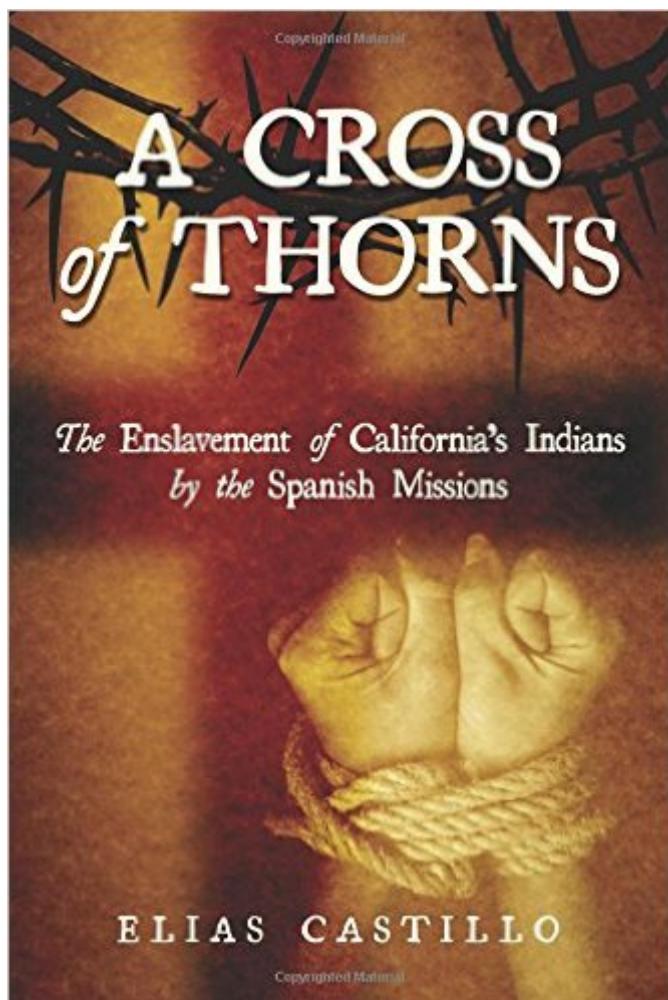


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# A Cross Of Thorns: The Enslavement Of California's Indians By The Spanish Missions



## Synopsis

The Spanish missions of California have long been misrepresented as places of benign and peaceful coexistence between Franciscan friars and California Indians. In fact, the mission friars enslaved the California Indians and treated them with deliberate cruelty. "A Cross of Thorns" describes the dark and violent reality of Mission life. Beginning in 1769, California Indians were enticed into the missions, where they and their descendants were imprisoned for 60 years of forced labor and daily beatings. The chilling depictions of colonial cruelty in "A Cross of Thorns" are based on little known church and Spanish government archives and letters written by the founder of California's mission, Friar Juniperro Serra (who advocated the whipping of Mission Indians as a standard policy), and published first-hand accounts of 18th and 19th century travelers. Tracing the history of Spanish colonization in California from its origins in Spain's 18th century economic crisis to the legacy of racism and brutality that continues today, "A Cross of Thorns" is one of the most thought-provoking books ever written on California history.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 235 pages

Publisher: Craven Street Books (February 16, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1610352424

ISBN-13: 978-1610352420

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (29 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #228,460 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #132 inÂ Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Religions, Practices & Sacred Texts > Tribal & Ethnic > Native American #151 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Caribbean & Latin American #178 inÂ Books > History > Americas > Mexico

## Customer Reviews

Journalist/author Elias Castillo shatters the image of California's Missions as idyllic places where Franciscan friars and poor Indians lived together in peace in his scathing "A Cross of Thorns". Castillo spoke recently at the California State Indian Museum in Sacramento, and said: "The Missions were camps where more than 60,000 Indian workers died, due to whippings, disease, and malnutrition". "A Cross of Thorns" is the result of six years of research and study of original

documents, including eyewitness accounts, records kept by the Franciscan friars themselves, and letters by church and government leaders in California and Mexico. "The Spanish missions of California have long been misrepresented", said Castillo, a former Associated Press reporter, who has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize three times. Castillo says: "The mission friars enslaved the California Indians, and treated them with deliberate cruelty. Beginning in 1769, most of the California Indians were brought to the missions, imprisoned, and forced into hard labor. There were daily beatings." An eyewitness account by Captain Jean-Francois de Galaup recalls his visit to today's calm, serene Mission Carmel. But he was there in 1786. He saw men and women collected by the sound of a bell, as a missionary lead them to work, the church, and other exercises. The Captain could not help but notice a similarity to plantation life experienced by black men and women. Other reports come from little known church and Spanish government archives. Castillo recounts letters written by the founder of California's mission, Friar Juniperro Serra. In these reports, Sera advocates the whipping of Mission Indians.

The book is much larger than the Missions story. It as well gives a detailed historical context for the California Missions. Highly readable and interesting, it is well organized and referenced. In any secular setting, Father Serra and many of his cohort might be functional psychopaths, but because of their religious context, they got a pass, at least to a great extent. You expect religion to mitigate evil, not amplify it. Actually, Father Serra's instincts in another time seem to parallel those of ISIS and other current religious extremists in an emphasis on afterlife at the expense of carnal hell on Earth, "Serra frequently proclaimed, 'Thanks be to God that by now there is not a mission that does not have sons in heaven.'" Baptize them quick and get them to the afterlife ASAP. Forget about the Golden Rule, or at least as most people would understand it, since the sooner the Indian charges die, the sooner their baptized souls can ascend to heaven to fulfill the good Father Serra's delusions. I figure Pope Francis is taking a page from the American politics playbook - "play to the base" - in canonizing Father Serra. There are far more Catholics than Indians, so playing to the base means declaration of sainthood for Father Serra. It looks like a typical political power play for the larger base - Catholics vs. Indians - exactly as commonly unfolds in everyday US politics. Same deal. The history and feelings of Indian groups don't matter much because they comprise much smaller numbers than the Catholic base. Pope Francis seems to be far more progressive than his predecessors, but politics and power may get prioritized as always.

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